



## **A FAILING GRADE FOR REMOTE LEARNING**

When the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading across the U.S., many schools made the tough decision to temporarily close and shift to virtual classes. By April 17, 2020, 43 states and Washington D.C. had required schools to close, and seven states recommended it.<sup>1</sup> Many schools also remained closed for the majority or entirety of the 2020-2021 school year. In December 2020, 56% of school districts were still fully remote.<sup>2</sup> By May 2021, only 2% of school districts were fully remote.<sup>3</sup> Education is a vital part of a child's development and essential to preserving a free society, and so the losses resulting from the school closures and remote learning are devastating.

- **Loss of learning in reading and math.**

- Many students failed to gain proper understanding in reading and math during remote school. By comparing the reading and math scores from 2021 to 2019, the Texas Education Agency found that remote teaching resulted in a loss of learning. In reading, 34% of students grades 3 through 8 met their grade-level's expectations compared with 39% in 2019. In math, only 28% of students grades 3 through 8 met their grade-level's expectations compared with 40% in 2019. Similarly, high school students' Algebra I test scores show only 41% met expectations compared to 62% in 2019.<sup>4</sup> It is evident that school closures hurt, but the student scores were not excellent to begin. School closures made a bad situation worse.
- A Gallup survey in Massachusetts found that 41% of high-school students who are in person, full-time "strongly agree that they learn a lot every day," while only 16% of students in full-time remote school said so. Also, 8% of in-person students said they were falling behind, while one third of fully remote or hybrid students said they were.<sup>5</sup> Full-time remote students missed out on the best opportunity to learn.
- NWEA's, formerly the Northwest Evaluation Association, survey of 4.4 million students found that in grades 3-8, grades fell an average of 5-10% in math from fall 2019 to fall 2020.<sup>6</sup> Students consistently lost math skills while attempting to learn while fully-time remote.

- **Loss of attendance.**

- In addition to performing poorly on tests, many students failed to attend virtual school altogether. For example, Los Angeles Unified School Districts reported that an average of 32% of high-school students did not log into virtual classes each day.<sup>7</sup> The superintendent is concerned that some of these students are those who are in foster care or living in poverty.<sup>8</sup>
- In fall 2020, at Provide Public Schools in Rhode Island, students who were fully remote attended class less often and received lower grades for incomplete classwork than students who attended in-person classes.<sup>9</sup> Also, a study of 33 California school districts showed that the chronic absence rate doubled to 16% in sixth grade and 21% in seventh grade.<sup>10</sup>

- **Loss of support for low-income and high-need students.**

- From reduced school services to limited access to electronics and broadband, students who live in poverty face the greatest disadvantages from remote instruction. The lack of school opportunity during pandemic harms students, especially in low-income Black and Hispanic communities where they rely on education for opportunities to build a future out of poverty.<sup>11</sup> Further still, students who depend on

mental health care at school, come from food insecure households, or live at risk of abuse or neglect at home faced additional challenges during school closures.<sup>12</sup>

- Students who were already behind in their classes now face more difficulties catching up. For example, in fall 2019, 47% of at-risk D.C. students were more than 2 grades behind in math, and the amount increased to 55% in 2020.<sup>13</sup> Experts are united in announcing that students will struggle to progress without in-person instruction.<sup>14</sup>
- **Loss of opportunity for mental and emotional growth.**
  - School provides more than just instruction—it offers opportunities for social, physical, and behavioral activities. Virtual instruction fails to offer these activities that support mental and emotional growth and health.<sup>15</sup> A 2020 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study shows that virtual instruction poses more risks to mental health and wellness of children than in-person school.<sup>16</sup>
  - Some educators are most concerned about the impacts of school closures on kindergarteners because social and emotional learning is especially important at this age. Kindergarten is where students “learn the building blocks of how to be students.”<sup>17</sup> Keeping them at home impedes these key developments.
- **Loss of healthy minds and bodies.**
  - During school closures and social isolation, eating disorders increased among students. For example, the number of eating disorder patients at Boston Children’s Hospital tripled and requests for eating-disorder treatment has increased from 6 cases per week to 23 cases.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Tracy Richmond called the mental-health problems of adolescents “like a second pandemic.”<sup>19</sup>
  - In May 2020, just after school closures began, 29 percent of parents with school age children said their child’s mental and emotional health was worse than before the pandemic, and by October 2020, it rose to 31 percent of parents.<sup>20</sup> These parents often cited that it was a major challenge to be separated from classmates and teachers during school closures.<sup>21</sup>
  - Young girls have been particularly vulnerable to lost resources and opportunities at school. Emergency room visits for potential suicide attempts for girls ages 12 to 17 increased 50 percent from February to March in 2021 compared to 2019.<sup>22</sup>

School closures and remote learning have received a resounding F. Department of Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said he expects school to open for full time, in-person instruction this fall.<sup>23</sup> Also, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reports, “Opening school generally does not significantly increase community transmission,” especially when appropriate health safety measures are followed.<sup>24</sup> AAP encourages schools do “everything possible” to keep students in-person for school.<sup>25</sup>

For the sake of students’ mental and emotional well-being, schools should work to open for fully in-person instruction for the duration of the 2021-2022 school year. If schools don’t, the consequences will negatively affect a generation of students for a lifetime.

- <sup>1</sup> Hoffman, Jessica and Miller, Edward. “Addressing the Consequence of School Closure Due to COVID-19 on Children’s Physical and Mental Well-Being.” World Medical and Health Policy. August 20,2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wmh3.365>
- <sup>2</sup> Koh, Yoree. “Fewer Children Are Attending School, Remotely and In Person.” *Wall Street Journal*. February 5, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fewer-children-are-attending-school-remotely-and-in-person-11612521003>
- <sup>3</sup> Malkus, Nat. “Nearly all school districts finally offer some in-person instruction: We should not be satisfied.” The Hill. <https://thehill.com/opinion/education/553798-nearly-all-school-districts-finally-offer-some-in-person-instruction-we>
- <sup>4</sup> Malkus, Nat. “Texas provides an early, ominous look at pandemic learning loss.” Return 2 Learn Tracker. June 30, 2021. <https://www.returntolearntacker.net/2021/06/30/texas-provides-an-early-ominous-look-at-pandemic-learning-loss/>
- <sup>5</sup> Koh, Yoree. “Fewer Children Are Attending School, Remotely and In Person.” *Wall Street Journal*. February 5, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fewer-children-are-attending-school-remotely-and-in-person-11612521003>
- <sup>6</sup> Einhorn, Erin. “When COVID-19 closed schools, Black, Hispanic and poor kids took biggest hit in math, reading.” NBC News. December 1, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/education/when-covid-19-closed-schools-black-hispanic-poor-kids-took-n1249352>
- <sup>7</sup> Hobbs, Tawnell and Hawkins, Lee. “The Results are in for Remote Learning: It Didn’t Work.” *Wall Street Journal*. June 5, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-coronavirus-remote-learning-lockdown-tech-11591375078>
- <sup>8</sup> Id.
- <sup>9</sup> Koh, Yoree. “Fewer Children Are Attending School, Remotely and In Person.” *Wall Street Journal*. February 5, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fewer-children-are-attending-school-remotely-and-in-person-11612521003>
- <sup>10</sup> Id.
- <sup>11</sup> Ewing, John. “The Ridiculousness of Learning Loss.” *Forbes*. December 28, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnewing/2021/12/28/the-ridiculousness-of-learning-loss/?sh=462af0f57c32> and Dorn, Emma, Hancock, Bryan, Sarakatsannis, Jimmy, and Viruleg, Ellen. “COVID-19 and learning loss--disparities grow and students need help.” McKinsey&Company. December 8, 2020. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help>
- <sup>12</sup> Hoffman, Jessica and Miller, Edward. “Addressing the Consequence of School Closure Due to COVID-19 on Children’s Physical and Mental Well-Being.” World Medical and Health Policy. August 20,2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wmh3.365>
- <sup>13</sup> Stein, Perry. “D.C. students are falling behind in remote school, with vulnerable students faring worse, data suggests.” *Washington Post*. December 17, 2020. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-students-learning-loss-pandemic/2020/12/17/090755ec-4062-11eb-8db8-395dedaaa036\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-students-learning-loss-pandemic/2020/12/17/090755ec-4062-11eb-8db8-395dedaaa036_story.html)
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- <sup>24</sup> “COVID Guidance for Safe Schools.” American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>
- <sup>25</sup> Id.